

Integrating The Monorail

MAYOR'S LETTER

DEIS Comments

City of Seattle Comments on the
Seattle Monorail Green Line
Draft Environmental Impact
Statement

October 2003



City of Seattle



Gregory J. Nickels
Mayor of Seattle

October 14, 2003

Ross Macfarlane, Director
Legal & Environmental Affairs
Seattle Monorail Project
1904 3rd Avenue, Suite 105
Seattle, Washington 98101

Dear Mr. Macfarlane:

Thank you for the opportunity to provide comments on the Green Line Draft Environmental Impact Statement (DEIS). The City's comments begin with this overview of the issues that must be addressed in more detail in the Final Environmental Impact Statement (FEIS) to ensure that the monorail is well integrated into the Seattle neighborhoods and our transportation system. This overview is followed by more detailed comments for each segment and for each element of the environment.

Access and Mobility

The Green Line will enhance mobility in the Green Line corridor and access to the neighborhoods it serves, and represents an important step toward improving Seattle's transportation system. Project elements that are necessary for seamless transfers between modes and ease of pedestrian access are not sufficiently described in the Project Description, leaving some doubt as to the extent of the project's contribution to the transportation system. The FEIS must include more definitive drawings and descriptions of the project facilities that will result in good intermodal connections at major transit hubs such as King Street Station and Westlake, effective bus transfers at neighborhood stations that anticipate a bus feeder network, and pedestrian access to those stations that may present access challenges.

While the monorail holds great promise as an improvement to our transportation system, much of the Green Line would be located along arterial streets that provide critical access within neighborhoods and mobility for through-movement of people and goods. The insertion of the project facilities into this established transportation infrastructure will negatively impact the access and mobility functions presently provided by these key streets. The alignment alternatives differ significantly in the extent of their impacts on access and mobility. Center alignments generally have more adverse impact than side-of-street alignments because they restrict turning movements that are currently allowed. In several segments, the impacts of the side-of-street alignment alternatives could be further minimized by refining the alignment to achieve a better balance of space for freight, transit, bicycles, pedestrians, auto traffic and parking. The FEIS must present refined alignments, and must also identify mitigation for the impacts of any new or refined alternatives.



Urban Form and Economic Development

Our city streets do double-duty; in addition to providing critical access and mobility functions, they comprise much of the public realm that serves as the front door to our neighborhood centers and the historic and cultural resources of our built environment. As such, the quality of the streetscape plays a critical role in supporting the economic development potential of neighborhoods along the Green Line corridor. The Seattle Monorail Project's architecture and urban design program has already taken important steps toward designing project facilities that will be a sympathetic element of the streetscape. A weakness of the DEIS is its failure to capture the key aspects of this architecture and urban design program in either the project description or through proposed mitigation measures. To describe a project that can be successfully integrated into the streetscape, the FEIS must be more definitive in identifying the design requirements and project elements that will be included in the project.

Neighborhoods & Businesses

The insertion of the monorail guideway into existing streets and operation of the Green Line service to neighborhoods will impact both the supply of parking and the demand for parking. The parking supply is an economic issue for our neighborhood business districts. Parking may reasonably be treated as the lowest priority use of our roadways, but when the parking supply must be significantly reduced to accommodate an alignment that effectively meets other transportation and urban design objectives, mitigation will be necessary to ensure that neighborhood business districts are not significantly impacted by the loss of parking. It may be possible to manage the existing on-street supply of parking to address these impacts in some areas; in others, off-street solutions may be necessary.

The Green Line will attract riders because of its clear speed and reliability advantages over other travel alternatives available in the corridor. The advantages of the Green Line will be such that it will be reasonable to transfer from other modes, including private automobiles, when the inconvenience of the transfer is minimal. Wherever unrestricted parking is available within one-quarter mile of monorail stations, SMP should assume that the Green Line will generate demand for these parking spaces and crowd out other parking uses, unless the supply is restricted through residential parking zones and commercial parking restrictions. The impacts of this "hide and ride" demand are not adequately analyzed in the DEIS, but are inevitable without a parking management program at station areas. The FEIS must include parking management programs for the Crown Hill, Ballard High School, Market Street, Dravus Street, Delridge, Avalon, Alaska Junction and Morgan Junction stations in the Project Description.

Seattle neighborhoods and businesses will also be impacted by displacements necessitated by the project. I recognize that some displacements are an inevitable result of building transit facilities, which are essential public facilities. Nevertheless, I encourage you to endeavor to avoid those displacements with the greatest economic and community impact through alignment or design choices, whenever possible. Two potential displacements of significant concern are the Home Depot store in SODO and dry-dock facilities at Fisherman's Terminal. Displacement of the Home Depot store would have an unacceptable economic impact, and the FEIS must fully consider the difficulty of relocating dry-dock facilities given the regulatory environment under the Endangered Species Act.

Natural Environment

An advantage of the Green Line route is that it minimizes conflicts with parks, open spaces and other sensitive natural areas. Much of the planning and design focus can be directed to integrating the monorail into the built environment. The critical exceptions are primarily in West Seattle, where some alternatives have implications for the Longfellow Creek Greenspace and for West Seattle Stadium Park. In each of these areas, the FEIS must include more detailed analysis of the impacts, and consider refinements to alignment and station location alternatives that would avoid or minimize these impacts.

Construction Impacts

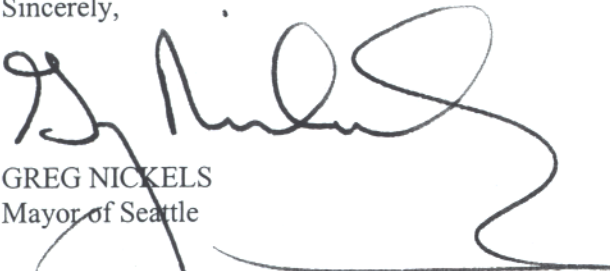
The construction techniques available for the monorail guideway offer the opportunity to minimize the impacts of construction. However, relocation of utilities has the potential for significant adverse impacts, particularly in downtown Seattle. The DEIS indicates all 2nd Avenue alignment alternatives will require relocation of utilities. As I have previously indicated, the relocation of the electrical ductbank on the west side of 2nd Avenue would have unacceptable impacts to downtown traffic, business activity, and your project schedule. I understand that SMP is working to refine the west alignment such that relocation of the electrical utilities may be avoided. I urge you to pursue similar design efforts to avoid the water main relocation associated with the east alignment, and to incorporate your findings into the FEIS.

Coordination of monorail construction with other major construction projects, including the accelerated schedule for construction in the Downtown Seattle Transit Tunnel to accommodate the Link light rail system, will be an essential mitigation measure. The FEIS must include discussion of SMP's participation in a coordinated multi-agency construction management program.

The FEIS will provide essential information to inform the City's final Green Line alignment decision. The relationship between the project scope described in your FEIS and a revised project budget and finance plan will be integral to the City's decision making process.

The City looks forward to working cooperatively with the Seattle Monorail Project as you continue your design, engineering and environmental process for development of the Green Line project.

Sincerely,



GREG NICKELS
Mayor of Seattle

cc: Seattle City Councilmembers
Seattle Planning Commission
Seattle Design Commission—Monorail Review Panel

Attachments: City of Seattle DEIS Comments-Reader's Guide

City of Seattle DEIS Comments-Ballard
City of Seattle DEIS Comments-Interbay
City of Seattle DEIS Comments-Uptown/Seattle Center/Belltown
City of Seattle DEIS Comments-Commercial Core & Pioneer Square
City of Seattle DEIS Comments-SODO
City of Seattle DEIS Comments-West Seattle
City of Seattle DEIS Comments-Transportation
City of Seattle DEIS Comments-Neighborhoods & Businesses
City of Seattle DEIS Comments-Natural Environment
City of Seattle DEIS Comments-Utilities & Construction
City of Seattle DEIS Comments-Miscellaneous